

## The Message From Bleaker's

By Alice Crittenden Derby

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The night operator at Bleaker's Lift had been crying. Job Daly, the taciturn old track walker, saw that with half an eye—which was all he ever directed toward the apt—when he came in for the coal scuttle that evening. Tearing his imagination for a cause, Job surmised that Rhoda wept because her father was laid up again with his crippled back, a memento of the last landslide, which he had died in order to tick off a warning to others. As a matter of fact the girl's tears were not filial ones, but pertained to the discovery that the young engineer of No. 7 was no ordinary sweat-of-the-brow running man, but a chap of very different caliber—in short, a son of the first vice president, with a penchant for practical knowledge concerning his father's road.

True, Dave maintained that a man is not accountable for his father and had blustered reassuringly when Rhoda wormed out of him the admission that his sire had shown a tendency to a hot box when told of their matrimonial plans.

"Dad needn't be so doggoned critical," grumbled Dave, blissfully depositing a cinder smudge near Rhoda's pink mouth. "He's self made, every inch of him; began at rock bottom forty years ago. He isn't snobbish either in some ways. He's often told me that I'm named for an old 'buddy' of his; some one he thought the world of and would give a lot to find."

Notwithstanding the vice president's magnanimity toward the memory of a whilom "buddy," Rhoda felt that her humble self as a daughter-in-law should not be wantonly thrust upon him, particularly since Dave confessed light heartedly that the act might blind him to an engineer's life in dead earnest. She was a girl with a conscience, and that unfeeling mentor represented that she ought not to wreck her lover's career. Therefore Rhoda was digging a little heart grave that night at Bleaker's Lift and trying to shovel big Dave into it.

Old Job in his wordless sympathy had filled up her coal stove so solicitously at 10 o'clock and again at 1 that Rhoda was driven to the open door for a breath of the keen mountain air of late November. The black night showed only a few sickly stars above the tall pines and Job Daly's lantern swinging along the winding path toward his own shanty. Suddenly this one friendly twinkle amid the darkness lurched sideways and went out.

"Job," called Rhoda concernedly, "Job, did you fall?"

There was no answer, and the girl turned resolutely within the office. She had lighted another lantern and was reaching for a wrap when unusual sounds made her wheel quickly. Five burly, evil looking men blocked the doorway.

Rhoda stepped across to the table, her eyes taking the old fashioned photograph hanging above it as one might appeal to a crucifix. It was the likeness of her father, whom she idolized, and she was taking counsel of him now and also thanking God that it was she on duty that night instead of him. Then she coolly and the intruder, her back to the table and one hand creeping out stealthily behind her.

"Drop that, curse you!" snarled one of the men. "You'll finger that ticker when I tell you to and not before. See?"

It was the ugliest villain of them all who spoke, and Rhoda's arm fell at her side.

"Now you'll wire the old man at Rumford," the fellow commanded, leveling a shining barrel at her head, "that there's a rock of a tree—make it a tree on the track, and the express'll have to take the siding. Tell 'em the old guy is hurt, and they'll have to throw the switch themselves." He lowered his voice, speaking to the others, "That'll give us time to fix the engineer and get aboard."

His accomplices nodded.

"Now hump yourself, girl. This man, Telegraph Bill, is next to the dot and dash hinge, so you can't fool us, and you'll do the job up proper or it'll be all day with you." A metallic click emphasized the threat.

Rhoda glanced slowly about the circle of dark, sinister faces. Coming last to Telegraph Bill, she saw that the man was listening intently to a message passing over the wire, and she knew the leader had spoken truly. They were not to be fooled.

An ashen pallor overspread her face. She reached hesitatingly for the key. Her fingers stiffened on it unwillingly, and jerkily the instrument began to tick. At the first sound Telegraph Bill looked up, and their eyes held each other for an instant, then the man's brow contracted doggedly, and he looked down. Even a train robber may not relish seeing a loyal hearted woman compelled to betray her post.

Tick, tick, tick, sped the message, while Rhoda gazed fascinatedly at the one man who understood it. When she had finished their eyes met again, but his spoke only a bold admiration before which Rhoda's lashes sank.

After cutting the wires the men fled out, engaged in muttered colloquy. Rhoda drew herself down, her head upon her arms. Then, at the thought of all that might yet be, she drew a bright little revolver from the drawer and held it tremblingly. A muffled step and Telegraph Bill stood before her, glancing back apprehensively, as if to see if he were watched.

The girl's weapon flashed suddenly.

With a hoarse imprecation the man lunged to the door, his temple striking a broken drawhead, which fate, in the person of Job Daly, had cast into a corner that afternoon. Blood gushed from two wounds and he lay white and motionless where he had fallen.

In Rhoda's ears was a running reverberation. She thought it was her own heart till the deck lights of a freight whizzed past and then she knew why the report of her shot had not brought the other men back. She crouched in her chair, hiding her eyes from that rigid, white faced object with its oozing blood. The wanted companion-ship of the sounder was gone and the mournful sighing of the pine trees without seemed a ghastly requiem for slain hope.

After many hours, she thought, there came a locomotive's sharp cry, waking the mountain echoes; then the nearer rolling thunder of a train. She heard the brake shoes grind upon the wheels and then oblivion enfolded her, unpenetrated by the hubbub of shouts and firing which followed.

What she knew next was that Dave bent over her, pressing her drooping head against the breast of his sooty coat. The room was full of men, some of them bound and gagged. Among these latter was Job, for once more silent than even he enjoyed, though he spoke no word when some one loosed him.

A stately old gentleman emerged from the background and, crossing over, twitched the engineer's sleeve. The young man lifted his eyes, a tender, adoring light still filling them.

"Father!" he exclaimed. "What in the name of all?"

The old gentleman smiled quizzically. "I had a fancy to see how you ran an engine, Dave, and I got right into it. Hey, boy?"

At that moment a commotion arose from the ruffian in the corner. Raising himself on one elbow he stared stupidly about, then lifted a vindictive fist and shook it at Rhoda.

"You young Jesabel, you," he roared painfully, "to serve me like this after I'd saved you from the gang. They'd have strung you a through ticket if I'd blown your message, and you know it, too, you—you-bully little devil hen! I was going to help you make a sneak if you hadn't plugged me, but—"

A groan and a collapse ended the sentence.

Rhoda sprang forward, remorsefully wringing her hands. Dave's gaze went with her devoutly.

The vice president looked from one to the other. Then he adjusted his eyeglasses and picked up the yellow telegram slip which the division superintendent had just laid down. He read: "Danger at H. Robbers waiting for train No. 7. Don't stop, for God's sake."

The official smiled again, this time a little uncertainly. Edging closer to his son he laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder.

"Lad," he said reproachfully, pointing to the little photograph above the table, "why didn't you tell me long ago that she was Dave Brody's girl? Surely you knew that he was my old buddy?"

### The Color of Water.

After long hesitation scientific men agree in admitting that water physically pure seen in mass is sky blue. This color is that taken by the white light of the sun when absorbed by the water in consequence of a phenomenon the explanation of which would be a little long. It is not due to the chemical purity of the water, since the sea, which is the bluest water, is also that which contains the most salt. Nevertheless, according to Forel's experiments, the matter in solution should be the predominant cause of the modification of color, upon which act besides the matter in suspension the color of the bottom and the reflection of the sky and of the banks. Consequently blue water is pretty rare in nature. A good many seas and lakes that give us the impression of this tint are green. The water at present acknowledged to be the bluest is that of the Sargasso sea, between the Cape Verde Islands and the Antilles. The water of the Mediterranean off the French coast and around Capri is bluer than that of Lake Leman, much less blue itself than that of the lakes of Kandersteg and Arolla, in Switzerland.—Paris L'Illustration.

### Calling the Landlady.

A man's curiosity got the better of him in a Back Bay lodging house one day, and he paid for it as is usually the case. He said he hadn't seen the landlady during his stay of three months, the rents being paid to the housekeeper, and a friend to whom he made this remark said that she was around about every day—in fact, he wouldn't be surprised if she was in the house then. To test his confidence he was willing to wager the cigars that she was there, and his doubting friend considered it too easy a thing to lose, so he said, "Agreed." Then the man who was certain proceeded to win easily. Seizing a plate from the table, he dropped it upon the floor, and in less than a minute the woman of the house was on the scene inquiring about the cause of the noise. The doubter was satisfied.—Boston Globe.

### Men Need Big Mirrors.

"A man's dressing room needs a full length mirror as much as a woman's boudoir." This declaration was made by a speaker at a convention of merchant tailors, and the statement met with no contradiction—in fact, after the convention had adjourned it was found that every maker of garments in the hall believed that it would make the American citizen a better dressed person if he would make arrangements to "ape himself as others see him." This is not "foppish," it was declared, even though it can be done only through the use of the long mirror, heretofore held sacred to my lady's wardrobe.

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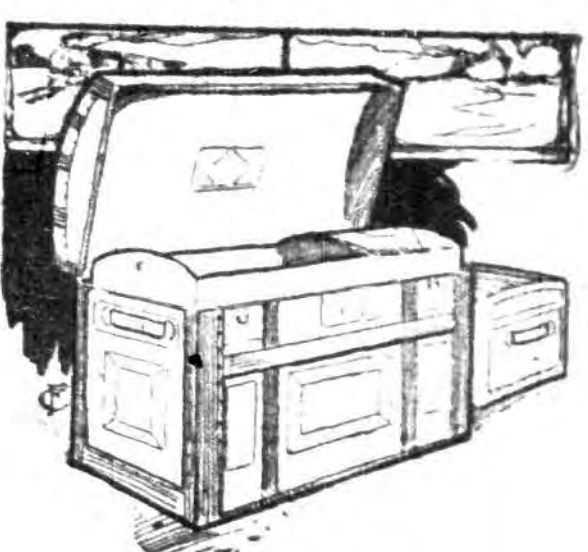
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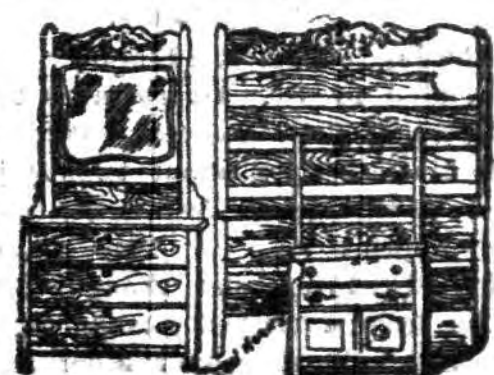
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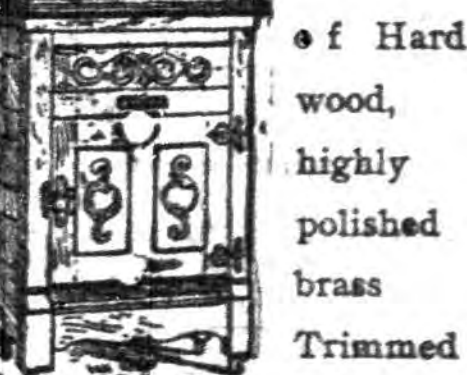
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